



NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 284.

Price, Five Cents.

NICK CARTER AND THE THIRTEEN CLUB

TRAILING A TRIPLE MURDERER



BY
THE AUTHOR
OF 'NICK CARTER'.

INSTANTLY NICK AND CHICK LEAPED FORWARD, AND THE MEN WERE HURLED BACK.

WHEEL
MAGAZINE





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No. 284.

NEW YORK, June 7, 1902.

Price Five Cents.

Nick Carter and the Thirteen Club;

OR,

TRAILING A TRIPLE MURDERER.

By the author of "NICHOLAS CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

A DOUBLE MURDER.

"Have you read the morning papers, Nick?"

Chick asked the question as he bounded into Nick Carter's private room in New York early one morning in September.

"Yes," replied Nick, looking up from the work of packing a small valise; "what do you make of it?"

Familiar as Chick was with the odd ways of his chief, he stopped and stared at him with a blank look on his face.

"What do I make of what?" he asked.

"Of the case you came here to talk about," was the sober reply.

Chick threw himself into a chair and lit a cigar.

"Perhaps," he said, "you can tell me the name of the case I came here to talk about?"

Nick never looked up from his work of packing.

"Of course I can," he replied.

"You're a mind reader if you can," said Chick, "for the papers are full of murders, burglaries, and embezzlement cases this morning."

"But," replied Nick, "there is only one case in the whole lot calculated to put a detective on his mettle."

"Well?"

"And you, being a good detective," continued Nick, "came here to talk about that one case."

"When you get done with your flattery," said Chick, with a pleased look on his face, "perhaps you'll have the kindness to give a name to that one case."

"Certainly. It is the double murder down in Ohio."

"Correct. Queer case, isn't it?"

"Decidedly so, I should judge, although the papers say very little to the point."

"I'd like to take a whack at it," said Chick.

"How soon can you get ready?"

"To go to Ohio?"

"Yes."

"I am ready now," was the excited reply. "Have you accepted the case?"

"Yes."

Chick threw his hat toward the ceiling, and gave a most undignified whoop.

"It's just the thing," he said. "I'm dying for a breath of fresh air. It seems as if I'd been working on city cases for the last million years."

"I'm afraid this Ohio case won't prove much of a picnic," said the detective.

"Who employed you?"

"The county authorities."

"Any clew?"

"They say not."

Chick laughed.

"They wouldn't know a clew from a red barn," he said. "When do you start?"

"In ten minutes," replied Nick, looking at his watch.

Chick always kept an assortment of disguises at the home of his chief, and he began packing at once, declaring that he had five minutes to spare.

Early the next morning the detectives found themselves in Toledo, and about ten o'clock they alighted at Weldon Hill, a "blind siding," some distance away.

A middle-aged, farmer-looking man stepped forward to meet them.

"Mr. Carter?" he asked, gazing at the detective much as he would have sized up the famous white elephant.

"Mr. Brown, for the purpose of this case," replied Nick. "You are Sheriff Colleton, I presume?"

"Yes. I was afraid you would not be able to come."

"This," said Nick, turning to Chick, "is my assistant. Call him Smith, for short."

"Is it the celebrated Chick?" asked the sheriff.

"The same."

"I expected to see a couple of giants," said the sheriff, with a smile.

"Well, we are all here," replied Nick, "so you see all there is of us. You may as well take us to the house at once."

"It is just over the hill," said the sheriff, "and I can tell you all I know of the case as we walk along."

"Don't say a word about it," replied Nick. "I want to get my own impressions first."

In five minutes the three men stopped at a comfortable farmhouse, standing a short distance from the main road.

"This is the Weldon place," said the sheriff, "and here is where the murders were committed."

"I understand," said Nick, stopping at the rear door, "that the murdered man and his wife were alone in the house at the time the deed was committed? The papers said that much."

"Yes, all alone, and the bodies were not found until the next morning."

"And that was the day before yesterday?"

"Yes; the murders were committed on Sunday night."

"When does the funeral take place?" asked Nick.

"It took place yesterday afternoon."

"That's bad," said Nick. "You should have waited until I got upon the ground."

"The relatives insisted upon immediate burial."

"Ah!"

The sheriff threw a keen glance in the direction of the detective.

"Surely," he said, "you don't suspect the relatives?"

"I suspect no one," was the reply. "Where were the bodies found?"

"The man was found on the kitchen floor on the other side of this door, and his wife was found in the sleeping-room."

"On the floor?"

"Yes. She had been shot three times—once in

the arm, once in the back, and once through the heart."

The sheriff opened the kitchen door and began pointing out the bloodstains on the floor.

"Wait," said Nick, darting into the room. "Has anything been moved since the night of the murders?"

"Nothing; I have been very careful about that, both here and at the barn."

"Show me the sleeping-room."

The sheriff led the way through the dining-room and opened a door leading into a large bedroom.

"They slept here," he said, "and here is where the body of Mrs. Weldon was found."

There was a heavy rag carpet on the floor, and Nick examined it carefully.

Then he paused for a moment in the dining-room and hastened to the kitchen.

When the sheriff got to the latter room he found the cellar door open, and heard the detective prowling around among the barrels and potato bins.

"There is nothing to be learned down there," he said, turning to Chick. "He is only losing time."

"We shall see," was the reply.

Presently Nick returned, rolling something hard in his hand.

"What do you make of it?" asked the sheriff.

"The Weldons were away from home in the evening before the murder?" asked Nick.

"Yes. How did you find that out?"

Nick pointed to a shelf in the dining-room where the lamps were kept.

"The lamps were filled in the morning," he said, "and the wicks trimmed. They have not been lighted since."

The sheriff made an examination of the lamps, and found the wicks all fresh.

"But they must have had a light to go to bed with," he said. "There may be another lamp somewhere."

"They used a candle," said Nick.

"How do you know that?" demanded the sheriff, in surprise.

Nick pointed to some drippings of tallow on the floor of the kitchen, and then hastened out to the barn.

He returned in a few moments with a large tin pail and a crushed candle in his hand.

"The murderers were waiting for them when they got home," he said, addressing the sheriff, "and as soon as they were in bed, they knocked on the kitchen door."

"How do you know they were not in the house?" asked the sheriff.

"Because Weldon got out of bed, probably very softly so as not to awake his wife, who was asleep, and opened the kitchen door."

"Then a bullet was fired from an unusually large revolver, and the poor fellow fell dead in his tracks."

"Yes."

"The sleeping wife probably mistook the sound of the shot for the slamming of the kitchen door, and got up to let her husband into the house."

"He might have let himself in," said the sheriff, "if that had been the case."

Nick pointed to a night lock on the kitchen door.

"You must remember," he said, "that Weldon did not take his keys to bed with him. They were in the pocket of his trousers, lying on a chair at the head of his bed."

"That is where they were found," said the sheriff.

"Of course. They were found there the next morning, and the people who took charge of his effects were obliged to allow his watch to run down."

"You have guessed it exactly."

"There is no guess work about it," said Nick. "When the trousers were taken from the back of the chair the key fell out and remained hidden between the chair and the wall. It is a peculiar key, and so no other will fit the watch."

"Right again. You must be a wizard."

"When Mrs. Weldon heard the shot," continued Nick, "she got up and went to the kitchen. There

she saw the man who had done the shooting, standing by the door with a candle in his hand."

The sheriff was too surprised to make reply.

"The candle went out when it fell from the hand of the murdered man," continued Nick, "and the murderer had just relit it when the woman made her appearance."

Chick began to look decidedly interested.

"He had some difficulty in lighting it," resumed Nick, "for the reason that the wick had been bent over in the fall. He used the stub of the match to straighten it up with, and then advanced upon the woman."

"The match is there on the floor, behind the door," said Chick. "I saw it a moment ago, and noticed that it was burned short, and that what remains of it is covered with tallow."

"Exactly," said Nick. "The woman fled, but received a shot in the arm before she got to the door."

"Which arm?" asked the sheriff, with a smile.

Nick saw in a moment that it was the purpose of the officer to quiz him.

"In the right arm," he replied.

"Why the right arm?"

"Because the blood dripped on the right side of the room, facing the dining-room door. Am I correct?"

"Yes; go on."

"As soon as she reached the dining-room," continued Nick, "another shot was fired, this time striking her in the back."

"What makes you think so?"

"If the wound in the breast had been received in the dining-room," explained the detective, "she would never have reached the bed-room."

"I see."

"She gained the sleeping-room and fell to the floor. There she received the third wound, fired from a very heavy weapon."

"You mentioned a heavy revolver once before," said the sheriff. "You have not seen the wounds, how do you know the weapon used was a large one?"

"Because," replied Nick, "the bullet went through the body, through the carpet and the floor, and landed in the cellar."

The detective handed a flattened piece of lead to the sheriff as he spoke.

"There," he said, "is the bullet which finished the work begun in the kitchen."

"It is strange," replied the sheriff, "that none of my officers found it."

"After killing the woman," continued the detective, "the murderer went to the pantry in search of a lantern. He searched the place, but did not find one, for the very good reason that it had been left in the barn by the farmer."

"What next?" asked the sheriff.

"Failing to secure a lantern, he conceived the idea of using a tin pail to protect the flame of his candle from the wind. You can see where the blaze burned the bottom."

"I see," said the sheriff.

"Then he went to the barn and took a white horse from the rear stall on the right hand side."

"He certainly did."

"The horse had been used by Weldon and his wife that night, and had not finished eating his oats, so the murderer had quite a struggle getting him away from the manger."

"Yes, the horse was a pet, and probably resented being taken out at that time of night by a stranger."

"In the struggle the murderer dropped the candle and the pail, but finally got the horse out of the barn, hitched him in the corner there by the wall, and re-entered the house."

"How do you know it was a white horse?" asked the sheriff. "How do you know it was hitched there in the corner?"

"There are white hairs where the beast brushed against the wall," was the reply, "and there are marks of horse's feet in the flower bed."

"But they may have been made at some other time," suggested the sheriff.

"Hardly," replied Nick. "Weldon would not have tied a horse on his wife's flower bed."

"Well," said the county official, driven into a corner, "what makes you think the murderer went back into the house?"

"The body of the farmer was moved after the blood began to dry," was the reply, "and the murderer searched the dresses in the sleeping-room before he washed his hands, which were not bloody when he got the horse."

The sheriff started.

"We did not ascertain that the house had been searched," he said.

"It was searched most carefully," was the reply, "and the searcher did not obtain what he was looking after."

"How do you know?"

"Because he started away once or twice and returned, and because he was finally frightened away."

"We have found a man who passed the place at midnight," said the sheriff, "and all was quiet then."

"Had he turned in," said Nick, "he would have found the murderer sitting in the saddle there waiting for him to pass."

"But all this does not prove that the man was frightened away."

"The murderer," continued Nick, "was endeavoring to leave the impression that the crime was committed solely for the purpose of robbery. That being the case, he should have taken everything of value in sight. But he didn't. In his haste he neglected to pocket a valuable gold watch and chain. Now, a robber, a man out simply for spoils, would have secured that the first thing, especially as he had it in his hands."

"Had it in his hands?" echoed the sheriff.

"Yes, for the woman never left it in the tangle in which I found it. But you see the fellow was not looking for valuables. He was looking for papers, or something of that kind."

"Then robbery was not the object of the murder?"

"Certainly not. Do you know whether Weldon or his wife had any bitter enemies in this vicinity?"

"I think not."

"What sort of a man was he?"

"About thirty-five, healthy, jolly, and worth twenty or thirty thousand dollars."

"His heirs?"

"There is but one—a boy of five years, now visiting his mother's sister in Indiana. It was thought best to keep him away from the scene of the tragedy, as he is nervous and timid."

"Was Weldon born in these parts?"

"Yes, but he left at the age of twenty, and returned and married a neighbor's daughter about six years ago."

"Where did he keep himself during the nine years he was away?"

"No one knows. It is said he lived a wild life. He always had plenty of money when he returned home on a visit, which happened about three times during the whole period."

"Did he ever talk about those nine years?"

"Never."

"Do you know whether any of his old friends ever called on him here?"

"I think not."

"Had he any business complications?"

"Not that I know of."

"Property all invested around here?"

"I think so, and yet he occasionally talked of a very large fortune he was likely to get some day if he lived long enough."

"Did he ever say where it was, or what shape it was in?"

"No."

"You have told me all he was ever heard to say about it?"

"I think so. He used to say it was a question of vitality and careful living, and that he was in fair shape to come out on top."

"Rather strange talk."

"I always thought he referred to an endowment policy."

After making another careful examination of the premises, the two detectives left the house, first warning the sheriff to say nothing of their arrival.

At the "blind siding" was a small hotel, patronized principally by farm hands and section men, and here the two detectives registered, leaving word with the proprietor that they would like employment at any kind of farm work.

CHAPTER II.

THE THIRTEEN CLUB.

"What do you make of it now?"

"You heard what Sheriff Colleton said about the five-year-old boy?"

"The heir to the estate? Certainly."

"Well, don't you think he ought to have pretty good care?"

"What are you driving at, Chick?"

"I mean that he ought to be guarded day and night."

"Go on. That is not all you started to say."

"He stands between this fortune and a lot of relatives, who insist upon a speedy burial," replied Chick.

It was the night after the arrival of the detectives, and Nick and his assistant were standing in the kitchen of the deserted farmhouse.

Outside, the level fields were flooded with the light of an autumn moon, and the crickets were chirping in the hedges.

It was nearly twelve o'clock, and the detectives had just succeeded in getting out of the hotel unobserved.

Hundreds of people had visited the premises during the day, but no one had been allowed to enter the house after the departure of the detectives.

"You may be right," replied Nick, "but I can't believe the relatives are mixed up in the affair."

As he spoke, the detective unrolled a bundle which he carried under his arm, revealing several blankets taken from his bed, and a dozen small screws.

He at once began covering the windows with the blankets, taking great pains to leave no opening by which a ray of light might escape.

"Nails," he said, pushing away at the screws, "would have made too much noise."

"I wondered what you were hunting around after screws for," said his assistant.

"We can't be too careful," replied Nick, surveying the sealed windows with satisfaction, and then passing on to the sleeping-room.

When the windows there were sealed, he lit his dark lantern and began a close inspection of every article in the two rooms.

He crawled under the bed, drew the tacks from the carpet, and even pried up a loose board, which looked as if it might have been recently removed.

"The murderer spent a couple of hours in the house," he said, "and did not find what he wanted, so it is quite evident we shall have a long hunt for the private papers of the dead man."

He pulled the dresser away from the wall, and removed the back.

Chick hastened to his side.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A hiding-place between the boards of a double back."

"What does it contain?"

"Papers probably relating to that mysterious period of Weldon's life."

Nick untied the thin package, which was carefully wrapped in a piece of oiled silk, and laid its contents on the table.

Then the two detectives spent an hour examining the documents.

There were old letters, memoranda of streets and numbers in all the large cities of the country, and whole papers of figures and calculations.

"It is as I supposed," said Nick. "Everything here relates to those nine mysterious years."

"Wait," said Chick, puzzling over a paper, "here are dates which indicate recent writing."

He handed an ordinary sheet of letter paper to his

chief as he spoke, and Nick lost no time in mastering its contents.

It contained thirteen names, as follows:

- No. 1. Anton Baade, 1878.
Nov. 3, 1880. Three payments. Fever.
- No. 2. Larry Pierce, 1878.
Jan., 1881. Three payments. Railway accident.
- No. 3. Howard Dodge, 1878.
July 4, 1882. Five payments. Drowned.
- No. 4. Charley Class, 1878.
October 9, 1882. Five payments. Smallpox.
- No. 5. Henry Lyon, 1878.
June 2, 1885. Eight payments. Cancer.
- No. 6. James W. Maloney, 1878.
August 2, 1886. Nine payments.
- No. 7. Martin Brown, 1878.
September 9, 1889. Twelve payments. La grippe.
- No. 8. Frank Rogers, 1878.
November 6, 1889. Twelve payments. Quick consumption.
- No. 9. Richard Dixon, 1878.
Sixteen payments. Address, Toledo, O.
- No. 10. Robert Weldon, 1878.
Sixteen payments. Alive and all right.
- No. 11. Lon. Casey, 1878.
December, 1890. Thirteen payments. Fever.
- No. 12. Moses Hayden, 1878.
June 3, 1893. Sixteen payments. Murdered.
- No. 13. Victor Reed, 1878.
July 6, 1893. Sixteen payments. Murdered.

At the bottom of the names and memoranda was written, in the handwriting of the dead man:

The payments and interest to date amount to more than \$60,000. May I live to enjoy it.

Nick threw down the paper with a snort of satisfaction.

"At last," he said, "we have struck a case worthy of our best efforts. What do you make of it?"

"Nothing."

Nick laughed.

"I can't see what you find so remarkable about that jumble of names," said Chick, evidently out of humor.

"You notice thirteen names?" said Nick.

"Yes."

"The number usually selected for a mysterious club."

"So I have heard."

"Then there was a club of thirteen, of which Weldon was a member?"

"It does begin to look that way."

"The club must have been formed," continued the detective, "as a sort of life insurance concern, the surviving member to receive all the accumulations."

Chick sprang to his feet.

"A motive for the murder!" he said. "Sixty thousand dollars!"

"Possibly," said Nick.

"There is no other way to figure it," said Chick.

"It is a well-known fact," said Nick, "that one person out of thirteen dies every year, but in this case the mortality seems to have been considerably greater."

"And yet," said Chick, "out of this thirteen, four were alive after sixteen years, for three have died, or been murdered, this year."

"Yes, but the original thirteen ceased to exist after the first death. Now, you see, three out of four have died since last spring."

"And now about the sixth entry," said Chick. "What do you make of the case of Mr. James Maloney?"

"He stopped paying at the end of nine years," said Nick, "and there is no record of his death. He must have defaulted in his payments."

"And, if this is the case, he has no further interest in the club."

"So," said Chick, "we have only Mr. Richard Dixon, of Toledo, to look after."

"Not so fast," replied Nick; "get back to Maloney."

"But if he has defaulted, and is out of the club——"

"We have only guessed at that," said Nick. "He may come to the surface again in some of these papers."

The detective resumed the work of looking over the papers, and at length came to a large sealed envelope, evidently containing a number of documents.

"This may contain the clew to the whole matter," he said, "and we may as well wait until we get into a place more secure from interruption before opening it."

"I'd like to get my hands on Mr. Richard Dixon this moment," said Chick. "Just look at it. Hayden, Reed and Weldon murdered within a period of little more than three months, and Dixon the only one who seems to have an interest in their death."

"You might make a mistake."

"How could I?"

"Get back to Maloney!"

Chick laughed.

"You said that before," he said.

"These clubs are strange things," replied Nick. "Maloney might have been excused from keeping up his payments on the ground of poverty. In that case, he is still on deck—perhaps ready to make the deferred payments at the proper time."

"That is true."

"And in that case, he would still have an interest in the death of the remaining members, as he would inherit about sixty thousand dollars at their death."

"I think," said Chick, with a smile, "that we had better keep an eye on Mr. James Maloney, as well as Mr. Richard Dixon."

"Exactly."

"And now about these other murders," said Chick. "We must look them up."

"I recall both perfectly," said Nick.

"You do?"

"Yes."

"But you were not employed on the cases."

"No; but I have a history of each in my book here. I always keep such things."

As he spoke, the detective took a small notebook from his pocket, referred to the index, and opened it in two places.

"Moses Hayden," he said, "was murdered in a hack in Philadelphia on the third day of last June. The murderer was never found. No motive for the murder. Was a prosperous and wealthy business man. Was last seen in the company of a handsome and convivial young man."

"Good!" exclaimed Chick.

Nick opened the book at the other place.

"Victor Reed," he said, referring again to his notes, "was found dead in his bed at a hotel in New York. Poison. Was last seen in company with a charming young woman who claimed to be a distant relative. No cause for murder assigned. No clew."

"Good again," said Chick. "Both murders were similar to this one."

Nick was still busy with his notebook.

"In the case of Hayden," he said, "the convivial young man, the last person seen in the company of the victim, was a small, slight man, with a fair complexion and very black hair and eyes. Had small hands and feet, the former very white and shapely."

"Well?"

"And in the case of Reed," continued Nick, "the charming young woman was rather slight in form, with a milk-white complexion and black hair and eyes. She had shapely hands and small feet."

Chick walked up and down the floor, apparently greatly excited.

"What do you make of it?" asked Nick.

"Same person."

"I don't know about that," said Nick. "You must recollect that small feet with a man would be ordinary feet with a woman."

The assistant made no reply.

Nick continued the examination of the papers, but found nothing more of importance.

"Chick," he said, at length.

"Yes."

"We will have to go a long way from this place to solve the mystery of this murder."

"It's a sure thing. The place to start on the trail is the place where the charming young woman or the young man was last seen. And we can't get away too soon."

Nick gathered up the papers and put them in his pocket.

"I should like to know," he said, "whether any charming young women have been seen around these parts lately."

"We ought to be able to find out that with very little trouble," replied Chick.

"The taking of the horse puzzles me."

"Why does it?"

"Because a person coming here to commit such a crime would not be apt to run the risk of identification by coming on the cars, and in that case he would naturally go away in his own rig."

"He might have walked."

"That would be too slow. When the truth is known, you will find that the murderer drove into this section after dark."

"Well, we may as well go back to the hotel," said Chick.

"Wait," said Nick, "I am going through the house first."

As he spoke, the detective took the papers from his pocket, ran them over to see that they were all there, and placed them on the table while he adjusted his dark lantern.

When he left the room, a second later, he left them lying on the table.

When he reached the kitchen, Nick turned to his partner.

"You go down cellar," he said, "and I'll go up stairs. Be careful and not show any light at the windows. If we find any desk or bureau that ought to be searched, we'll seal the windows of the room where it is situated."

Chick passed down the cellar stairs, closing the door after him, and Nick mounted the front stairs.

No sooner had they disappeared from the kitchen than the outside door was softly opened and a dark form crept in.

The figure was that of a man, somewhat above the average height, and sturdily formed.

He entered the room which the detectives had recently left, and he cautiously around for the table.

He finally found it and struck a match.

The papers at once caught his eye.

He ran them over hastily, and put them into his pocket.

There was a smile of triumph on his face as he felt the important documents leave his hand.

"They are sharp fellows," he muttered, "but then they had plenty of time to search."

He started for the door again, but paused before reaching it.

He heard the sound of footsteps on the cellar stairs.

Chick, having completed his investigations, was returning to the upper floor.

The next instant the intruder heard the cellar door open.

He stood in the center of the room with a wicked-looking knife in his hand.

"This may be the proper way to settle the case, after all," he muttered.

Chick stepped into the kitchen, hesitated a moment, and then passed on toward the front of the house.

The intruder stepped toward the kitchen.

At that instant Nick was heard descending the front staircase.

The keen rays of Chick's lantern flashed for an instant into the room the intruder would have to pass through in order to gain the outer door.

There was no hope of escape in that direction.

While he stood there, irresolute, he heard the voices of the detectives in the parlor.

"Anything new?" asked Chick.

"Nothing," was the reply.

"There was nothing down cellar," said Chick.

"Well," said Nick, "I left the papers on the table in the sleeping-room. I'll get them, and then we will leave the house."

The intruder crouched back into the shadows by the foot of the bed.

The knife was still in his hand.

Nick and Chick stepped into the kitchen.

There the former paused and listened.

"I thought I heard a horse out there," he said.

Chick stepped to the door.

"Get your papers," he said, "and I'll go out and see."

The assistant passed out into the shadow of the building, and Nick hastened into the sleeping-room.

Turning the rays of his dark lantern on the table, he put out his hand to take the papers.

He turned the rays of his lantern on the floor, thinking they might have fallen off.

The papers were nowhere in sight.

Quick as a flash the detective turned off the light and stepped toward the door.

He knew well enough what had happened.

They had been followed to the house, and the papers had been stolen during his brief absence!

No one would want the papers but the murderer.

Therefore, the murderer had been in the place within the last three minutes!

He might be there yet!

Nick walked heavily toward the door, rattled the knob, banged the door, and remained silent and motionless in the room.

He could hear Chick walking about outside, and finally heard him give a low signal, the signal agreed upon in case of danger.

He listened intently for some sound in the room.

Presently it came.

The intruder moved away from the foot of the bed, passed a moment by the table, and started toward the door.

Judging of his position by the sound of his steps, Nick darted forward.

The next moment he caught the fellow in his arms.

There was a quick struggle, and then Nick felt the keen blade of a knife drawn across his hand.

Quick as lightning, he bounded away and drew his revolver.

Taking care to keep out of range of the door, he fired in the direction of the intruder.

But he had miscalculated his position.

As he fired, the door opened and Chick fell across the threshold.

The mysterious intruder darted over the fallen man and disappeared.

The next instant a horse galloped away.

CHAPTER III.

MR. RICHARD DIXON APPEARS.

"There is no such name in the city directory."

"And yet the memorandum must have been made since the publication of this year's book."

The two detectives were sitting in a room of a quiet hotel at Toledo, Ohio.

The time was the evening of the day following the events detailed in the last chapter.

"The man may have given a fictitious address," said Chick. "From what we have learned about the case, I should judge that he does not belong here."

"Where did you get that idea?" asked Nick.

"Well," was the reply, "clubs of the kind we are looking up would not be likely to be formed in a city of this size."

"Go on."

"In the first place, it was a wild scheme—just such a scheme as a lot of club men, and high-rollers at that, would be apt to conceive after the first dozen bottles of champagne. Toledo has no club with thirteen men of that stripe in it; or, at least, it could not have had sixteen years ago, when the club was formed."

"Good reasoning," said Nick. "Proceed."

"In the next place," continued Chick, "in order to have sixty thousand dollars now, the members must have put up at least five hundred dollars a year each. In 1878 there were not thirteen young men in Toledo rich enough and reckless enough to do that."

"Good again."

"Therefore, the club must have been formed in one of the large cities—New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago or San Francisco. I should say Chicago or San Francisco."

"But Hayden was murdered in Philadelphia."

"Did he reside there?"

"Yes, and always had; and Reed, who was mur-

dered in New York, lived in New York, and had, since infancy?"

"Then it follows that the members of the club did not all live in the same city?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Chick, "you have knocked me out once more. Dixon may live here, after all."

"Certainly, although he may be a wanderer."

"In that case we are likely to have a long search," said Chick.

"There is an easier way than that," replied Nick.

Chick looked up in surprise.

"The only way to bring the fellow to justice," he said, "is to find him."

"What I mean is," replied Nick, "that there is an easier way to find him than the one which seems to be in your mind."

"Well?"

"This money is drawing interest?"

"Yes."

"Then it must be in some bank?"

"Of course."

"When we find the bank, we'll find Mr. Richard Dixon or Mr. James Moloney trying to get the money."

Chick frisked about the room like a boy.

"Then it is only a question of time," he said.

"Yes," replied Nick, "the case is becoming very commonplace."

"But there is still lots of work in it," suggested Chick.

"It looks that way," replied Nick, "but I am going to make a strong effort to find Mr. Richard Dixon before I work the bank act."

"Perhaps he will find us first," said Chick, feeling of his sore head.

"Some one found us at the Weldon House last night," said Nick, "and came near fixing us both."

"It was you who came near fixing me," said Chick, with a laugh. "Your bullet grazed my head and knocked me out long enough for the fellow to get away."

"And take the papers with him," added Nick, impatiently.

"But he left his card on your hand," suggested Chick, glancing at his chief's bandaged fingers.

"Yes," said Nick, "and from this time on he will never leave our trail. He knows who we are and what we are after. That is more than we learned about him."

"He is a sprinter, at any rate," said Chick. "He got over me in a hurry."

"Still," said Nick, "he has left us a clew, after all."

"A clew?"

"Yes."

"I fail to see it. If you have it concealed about your person you may as well show it up."

"He left us the description of the murderer," was the reply.

"He did?"

"Yes. The description of a very large man, with sandy hair and beard. He has unusually large hands and a Roman nose. He drinks whisky, and is a great lover of horses—probably plays the races. He is in the army, and draws a pension for a wound received in the right leg."

"Do you know what I think?" asked Chick.

"Certainly. You think I am accumulating a choice collection of wheels in my head."

"Right you are."

"In order to punish you properly for your conduct," said Nick, with a laugh, "I shall not tell you how I know all this. When the man is caught, you shall see for yourself."

"There is at least one satisfaction about it," said Chick, smiling.

"Well?"

"Your description brings a new man into the field and casts doubts over all your other conclusions."

"You refer to the pale young man and the young woman with small hands and feet?"

"Yes. Don't you see that nothing can now be gained by following the murderer or murderess of Hayden and Reed?"

"Wait until we find Richard Dixon," said Nick, "and you'll see."

"Will he show up big or little?"

"Neither. He is neither the slim woman, who probably masqueraded as a man in Philadelphia in order to murder Hayden, nor the big blonde who uses a knife so viciously."

"Well," said Chick, "I wish you would find something for me to do back there at the Weldon farm. I want another sight of growing corn, and another sniff at that breeze."

"You had better go out and get a sniff of the Maumee," laughed Nick, "and don't forget to keep your eyes out for a man with big hands and feet, and a Roman nose."

The assistant smiled pleasantly and left the room.

Nick followed him in a few moments, going directly to the post office.

"I'll see first," he mused, "whether Richard Nixon gets mail here."

"Yes," replied the man in charge of the office, after Nick had convinced him that his inquiry was a legitimate one, "Richard Dixon gets mail here."

"Where is it delivered?"

"He comes to the general delivery window and asks for it."

"Then you don't know where he lives?"

"No."

"Are there any letters for him here now?" asked Nick.

"Yes; two."

"Then I'll have the general delivery window watched," said Nick. "Good-night."

As the detective stepped outside he found himself facing the bent figure of an old man with long white hair and a pale, intellectual face.

"Excuse me," said the old gentleman, "but I heard my name mentioned just now. I am Richard Dixon."

Nick started back like a man who had received a sudden physical shock.

"Impossible!" he said.

The old gentleman smiled.

"Why impossible?" he asked, in a low, sweet voice.

"I beg your pardon," said Nick, "but I thought you were a young man; at least a man in middle life."

"I am fifty-five," was the reply, "but time has not dealt kindly with me, and I appear to be much older."

"If you have a little time at your disposal," said the detective, "I should like to talk with you."

The old man glanced keenly out from under his heavy eyebrows.

"We can talk as we walk along," he said.

"It is hardly a matter to be talked over in a street conversation," replied Nick.

"My home is no place to talk," said the old gentleman.

"I have a room at the hotel," said Nick. "Would you object to going there?"

"Certainly not," was the reply. "You look like an honest man, and then I have nothing to fear."

After walking a few feet, Nick turned and faced his companion.

"There may be a mistake," he said. "I am in search of the Richard Dixon who was associated with Larry Pierce and others in the year 1878. Are you that man?"

Nick thought the old gentleman turned a trifle paler.

Once or twice he essayed to make a reply, but his voice seemed to fail him.

"I am on the right track," thought Nick.

"Yes," said the old man, sadly, in a moment, "I knew Larry Pierce in 1878."

"And Martin Brown and Moses Hayden?" asked Nick.

"Yes," answered Dixon, "I knew them all. There were thirteen of us banded together in a foolish, drunken moment."

Not another word was spoken until the two men were seated in the detective's room.

Then Nick asked:

"What became of James W. Moloney?"

The question seemed to startle the old man.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I must first know your object in asking these questions."

"I want to find James Moloney," was the reply.

"I do not know where he is."

"When did you last hear from him?"

"In 1886."

"After he had made nine payments?"

The old man started, trembling violently.

"How should you know anything of our club?" he demanded.

"That is immaterial," was the reply. "It is sufficient that I do know something of it. How many members of that club are alive at the present time?"

"Three."

"And those three are——"

"Moloney, Weldon and myself."

"Weldon is dead."

"Dead?"

The word was almost a shriek.

"Yes," replied Nick, "he was murdered last Sunday night, in a most mysterious manner."

"That makes three!"

Nick remained silent, for he saw that the old man was about to continue.

"Poor Weldon," he said. "I always believed he would be the one to inherit the money."

"And now," said Nick, "the money lies between Moloney and yourself. It is a large sum, is it not?"

"Yes, a very large sum; still, I shall probably not make my next payment."

"Why not?"

"Why should I, with the fate of Hayden, Reed and Weldon before my eyes?"

"Then you think——"

The old man stopped him.

"I think nothing," he cried. "Don't put me down as saying anything in regard to the manner of their death."

"Why did Moloney stop paying?" asked Nick.

"Poverty."

"Then he has no further interest in the money, and it belongs to you, every cent of it."

"Not so," replied the old man. "Moloney has the right to make up his back payments at any time before the death of the last member, and so take his chance with the rest."

"But if you should die before he makes the payments?"

"Then the money would go to my heirs."

"Then you may continue your payments in safety," said Nick.

"He has an interest in your life, not your death."

"Then you think——"

"I think nothing."

"But he may make his payments at any time, and in that case I shall not make mine."

"That is true," said Nick. "I overlooked that point."

"I have not had a moment's peace," said the old man, "since I heard of Hayden's death. It was a villainous compact."

"Where is the money deposited?"

"I don't know."

"Not know, and your interest so great in it?" said Nick, in amazement.

"Weldon was the secretary," said the old man, "and the papers will now be sent to me. Then I shall have the proofs of the death of the other members and know all about the money."

Nick thought of the sealed envelope which had been taken with the other papers, and remained silent.

The thief, then, held all the important documents in his possession.

The case was developing into anything but a commonplace one.

The idea of tracing the murderer through the bank was of no avail.

The theory connecting Dixon with the murders was exploded.

There remained only Moloney.

It was evident to the detective that Richard Dixon knew nothing of the means by which the three men had come to their deaths.

He was a weak, timid old man, incapable of such a series of crimes.

"Does Moloney know where the money is deposited?" asked Nick, after a moment.

"I think not, unless he made the deposit with Weldon before his murder. In that case, however, he would not know, unless Weldon took him to the bank, which would be against our rules."

"Then how can he make his payments, if he has not already made them?" asked Nick.

"By coming to me, after I get the papers in my hands."

"Is there no limit fixed to the time in which he may make these payments?" asked Nick.

"Yes. It is in this way: I am now the only living member in good standing. If he does not make the payments before the time comes for me to make mine the money reverts to me."

"Then why do you say you may not make your next payment?"

"Because I have no doubt that he will make his payments. Then it would lie between us two. I don't want such a thing to happen. My life would not be worth a dime."

The old man started at the sound of his own voice.

"I have said too much," he said, springing to his feet. "Don't understand me as expressing any fear of Moloney."

"But you have expressed great fear."

"You don't understand," said the old man. "I might be willing to drop out in his interest. Don't you see?"

"People in their right minds don't give away sixty thousand dollars," said the detective.

Dixon refused to talk further, and soon arose to go away.

Nick resolved to try him on another tack.

"It is very strange," he said, "that the three men who stood between the money and yourself should all be murdered, and that not one of the murderers should be taken."

The old man turned like a lion at bay.

"You surely don't suspect me?" he almost shrieked. "Remember that Moloney still lives, and he may make his payments."

Then the old man saw that he had said too much, and went grumbling out of the room.

Nick followed him.

He had not forgotten his words:

"Then the money would go to my heirs."

"I wonder who his heirs are?" thought Nick, following on down a dark thoroughfare leading towards Washington street.

Presently the old man stopped and muttered:

"I didn't call for my letters. I was so occupied with the fellow that I didn't call for my letters. Well, it is too late now."

He passed on, and before long turned into a narrow hallway.

Then Nick heard him ascending a staircase.

As Nick stepped into the hall, he saw a man standing directly in front of him.

The next moment he gave an exclamation of astonishment.

It was Chick.

"You are followed," whispered the latter. "Don't talk above a low whisper. Was that Richard Dixon who just went upstairs?"

"Yes. How did you know that?" asked Nick, in astonishment.

"I found out in the same way you learned that our friend of last night drew a pension," said Chick, with a laugh.

The fellow who had been following Nick now stopped a short distance from the hallway.

"That's one on me," said the detective. "I was so busy following Dixon that I did not see the fellow."

The detectives were dressed exactly alike, and it would have taken a close friend of the two men to have told which was which.

"Step out, and walk down the street," said Nick, "and he will follow you. Then I will see about Dixon."

"When you get up there," said Chick, "you will

and a charming young lady, with black hair and eyes, and small hands and feet."

"Who is it?" asked Nick.

"Dixon's daughter. I heard her addressed as Dixon on the street, and followed her here. I was just going up when you came."

"Are you sure it wasn't Moloney?" asked Nick, with a laugh.

"Have you heard anything about him to-night?" asked Chick.

"I have heard of nothing but Moloney," was the reply.

Chick stepped into the street, and the "shadow" followed him away.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DETECTIVES GET INTO TROUBLE.

At the head of the stairs, there was a door, opening to the right out of a wide hallway.

At the end of the hall was a large vacant room, where the tenants of the building kept their coal boxes.

At the door of this room the hall turned sharply to the right, and terminated at the head of another staircase opening on another street.

The door of the large coal-room was never locked, each tenant carrying a key to his own box.

When Nick Carter reached the head of the stairs he noticed that the rooms were all dark, and that the light in the hallway was burning very dimly.

He moved softly along until he reached the open door of the coal-room, and entered, taking a position which would enable him to see and hear what took place in the hallway.

Presently a light flared up in the room at the head of the stairs, and then the door was opened.

And there, clearly outlined against the shaft of light at her back, was a slightly-formed girl, with very black hair and eyes, and a dead white complexion.

Her hands were small and delicately formed.

"That," thought the detective, "must be the daughter of Richard Dixon. I wonder if that fair face of

hers is the last face Hayden and Reed ever looked upon?"

The whole matter was a puzzle to the detective.

Dixon did not seem capable of murder.

He trembled at the mere mention of the name of James Moloney.

Yet here was his daughter, answering perfectly the description of the last person the two murdered men had been seen in company with.

The fact that she had appeared as a young man at Philadelphia was proof positive that she was with Hayden for no good purpose.

For the detective was positive that the last person seen with Hayden was the same person who had been with Reed just before his death.

The girl looked carefully up and down the hall and then called out, in a tone of voice strangely resembling that of Richard Dixon:

"Clarence!"

There was no answer, and the girl walked to the head of the stairs and looked down.

"Clarence!"

While she stood there Nick crept out of the coal-room and approached a door opening into the suite of rooms she had just left.

This door was at the rear of the suite, and opened on that part of the hall which led to the second staircase, and was, therefore, not in sight from the place where the girl stood, or from any part of that portion of the hall ending at the coalhouse door.

The girl called again, and again, and presently the detective heard a movement on the stairs at his left.

Then a man's voice called out:

"Coming, Madge."

In order to reach the girl the fellow would be obliged to pass the spot where Nick stood.

To be seen would be fatal to the purpose of the detective.

He placed his hand on the knob of the door and turned it.

It was not locked, and, quick as lightning, he

dodged into the room, closing and locking the door after him.

The next moment the knob was given a quick turn from the outside.

Nick heard the fellow utter an exclamation of impatience, and pass on down toward that part of the hall where the girl was still standing.

The door between the two rooms was open, and the outer door still stood ajar, just as the girl had left it on going to the head of the stairs.

Therefore Nick could hear all that was said by the two persons.

"I thought you were never coming," said the girl, petulantly.

The fellow did not reply for a moment, and then he said, with the faintest suspicion of excitement in his tone:

"Who was that with your father?"

"There was no one with father," was the reply.

"He came upstairs alone and went directly to bed."

"Where—in the back room?"

"Yes."

"I noticed the door was locked when I came up. You promised to leave it open for me."

"I did leave it unlocked."

"Then your father must have arisen and locked it."

"No," replied the girl; "I gave him an extra dose, and he was asleep in a moment."

"Well, the door was locked."

Nick stepped softly back to the door, turned the key and concealed himself in a dark corner.

The next moment the girl passed hurriedly through the room and tried the door.

"You didn't half try," she said; "the door was not locked."

The fellow grumbled out some reply and threw himself into a chair in the front room, first closing the outside door by which he had entered:

The girl bent for a moment over the bed where her father lay asleep, and then joined him.

Nick heard the regular breathing of the old man, and knew that there was no danger from him.

The odor of opium was strong in the room, and the detective knew why he slept so soundly.

He was a victim of the morphine habit, and was but a child in the hands of his daughter.

"Father was late to-night," said the girl, "and finally came home from the postoffice without asking for his letters."

"Yes," said the man who had been called Clarence, "he was too much occupied with a man he met at the office to remember anything. They talked in the street, and then the old man went into a hotel and remained a long time."

"Could you see who the man was?"

"I have seen him before. It is a man we must watch," was the almost savage reply.

"Yes," said the girl, "it is not safe to allow father to talk with any one in the condition he is in."

"Be careful," said Clarence; "he may hear you."

The girl arose and closed the door between the two rooms.

"He is asleep," she said, "but we can't be too careful."

Nick stepped into a chair, mounted the top of a small dresser, which stood behind the door, and looked through the transom.

His heart gave a sudden bound as his eyes rested upon the figure of the man, sitting in the full light of the blazing gas-jet.

The man was large and tall, with sandy hair and beard. He had unusually large hands and a Roman nose. His face bore marks of dissipation, and, as he arose to get a match from the table, he limped slightly with his right leg.

The very image of the man the detective had described to Chick.

The man who had crept into the Weldon house the night before and removed the papers relating to the club.

"The case is opening up in great shape," thought the detective.

"Here is the girl who led Hayden and Reed to

their death, and here is the man who murdered Robert Weldon and his wife in their own home."

"It is just as well that your father did not ask for his letters to-night," said Clarence, in a moment.

"Why?"

"Because the contents of his mail would have excited him greatly."

"Excited him?"

"Yes."

"Explain, please."

"Robert Weldon is dead."

The girl sprang to her feet.

"I know what you are going to say next," she exclaimed. "He was murdered."

"Yes, he was murdered."

"When?"

"Last Sunday night."

The girl sat down again, and buried her face in her hands.

"The third one," she said.

"And the last one," replied Clarence.

"I don't care for that," sobbed the girl. "I wish there were a hundred more. Father's turn will come next."

"But the money belongs to him now."

"You forget Moloney."

Clarence started to his feet, barely suppressing an oath.

"Moloney is dead," he said.

"I don't believe it," said the girl. "Father lives in constant fear of him. He will come upon us some day and murder us both."

"But he could have no motive in that," urged Clarence.

"He murdered Hayden, and he murdered Reed," said the girl, "and now he has murdered Weldon."

Nick's theories were tumbling to the ground.

He believed he had made a mistake in the girl.

She might have had no hand in the killing of Hayden and Reed.

She seemed to deplore the death of Weldon, because it seemed to put her father in greater peril.

"At least," thought Nick, "I can't be mistaken in the man who sits there smoking. He is the man who secured the papers last night."

"I don't believe in the connection between the club money and the three murders," said Clarence, after a pause. "It is only a coincidence, that is all."

The girl made no reply.

"And that recalls another coincidence," continued Clarence. "You doubtless remember that the person last seen with Reed was a young woman answering exactly to your description."

"Moloney's work," replied the girl.

"How can that be?"

"If the existence of the club had been discovered at that time," was the reply, "I should have been followed and persecuted by the officers of the law until I proved that I was not in New York at the time of the murder."

"But where does Moloney come in?" asked Clarence.

"He did it to cast suspicion upon my father and myself."

"Oh."

"You needn't laugh," said the girl, angrily. "It is no laughing matter."

"What did your father say when he came in to-night?" asked Clarence, in a moment.

"He said very little."

"Did he mention meeting any one?"

"No."

"Did he seem excited?"

"I thought so; that is why I gave him an extra dose."

"Then," said Clarence, hastily, "the man he met was a messenger bearing news of Weldon's death."

"You said a moment ago," said the girl, "that you had seen the man before, and that he was a man to be watched. Where and when did you see him before to-night?"

The fellow hesitated.

"I have seen him with your father many times," he replied, after a short pause.

The girl shuddered.

"It may be Moloney," she said.

"I thought that," was the reply, "although I have always believed Moloney to be dead."

"Father can't live long now," said the girl, sorrowfully. "It is the morphine that keeps him alive. Moloney will soon have his blood money."

"But he has a large payment to make before he can claim it."

"He will make it."

Clarence went to the door, and looked out into the hall.

"I heard a noise out there," he said.

Nick crept down from the transom and stood by the rear door.

He had an idea that it was about time for Chick to show up.

Clarence stumbled around in the hall for a moment, and then went into the coalroom.

Nick heard him moving around in the darkness for a moment, and then he reappeared in the hall.

"It must have been some of the roomers passing through the hall," he said, addressing the girl. "I think I'll go now."

The girl closed the door, and Clarence went on downstairs.

Nick left the room by the rear door and followed him.

At the foot of the stairs he saw Chick standing just across the street.

Clarence had passed along without seeing him.

"Well," asked the detective, when the two men met a moment later, "where did he go?"

"He just chased around until he lost track of me, and then went to the building where you found him."

"Were you up in the hall?"

"Yes; I got out of the place just in time to prevent his seeing me," was the reply.

Clarence was still in sight, and the detectives followed on after him.

"What did you discover?" asked Chick.

"The girl theory is exploded," was the reply.

"Exploded?"

"Yes."

"I would have gambled on that," said Chick.

"So would I, a short time ago," said Nick, "but there is nothing in it. She even fears that her father will share the fate of the other three."

"Did you catch a good look at the fellow who followed you?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

"The man who murdered Robert Weldon, and the man who stole the papers last night."

"Then," said Chick, "we have very little more to do in this case."

"We have the proof to get," replied Nick.

"How do you propose to get that?"

"I mean to turn burglar, and sneak into his room to-night," was the reply.

"He probably is not fool enough to keep the papers there."

"We shall see," replied Nick.

Presently the fellow turned toward Summit street, and walked up that thoroughfare until he came to a large building not far from the corner of Jefferson street.

There he turned in, and soon a light appeared in one of the front windows on the third floor.

"There he is," said Nick, as Clarence stepped to the window and lowered the shade.

The halls and passages on the interior of the building were very irregular, and it took some moments for the detectives to locate the door of the room Clarence had entered.

All was dark outside, and they stood in the little entry leading to the door and waited.

Before long they heard voices on the inside.

"Now for the true story," whispered Nick.

"How did you get on?" asked a voice.

"Tough, Andy, tough," replied Clarence.

"What's up?"

"The very devil is to pay."

"Well?"

"A detective had hold of old Dixon to-night."

"Pshaw!"

"I saw him meet the old man in the post office," said Clarence, "and followed them to a hotel."

"The devil!"

"They remained in a private room a long time, and when the old man went away the detective followed him."

"And you followed the detective?"

"Yes."

"And spotted him?" asked Andy.

"No; confound the luck, he got away."

"And then?"

"I went to see Madge."

"Did you tell her about the murder?"

"Yes, and she raised a great rumpus over it."

"She did the same thing last Sunday night when you were talking about the other murders."

Last Sunday night!

The listening detectives caught each other by the arms.

The night of the Weldon murder!

That man in Toledo that night!

"I have an idea," whispered Chick, "that we had better go and put some country constable on this case."

Nick laughed softly to himself.

"First," continued Chick, "we were sure of the girl, and she showed up all right. Now we are here to capture the murderer, and find that he was here on the night the murder was committed. I give it up."

"Be patient," whispered Nick. "He may not have been here, after all."

"Patient," repeated Chick, "we haven't an inch of ground to stand on. We are knocked out, unless he has deceived his roommate."

"You forget Moloney," whispered Nick. "We are not knocked out until we investigate him."

"See here," said Chick, "if you don't stop bring-

ing Moloney into all phases of the case, I shall do you personal violence. I am sick of Moloney."

"He'll be sick of himself when we get done with him," replied the detective.

"Are you going to stay here?"

"Yes; remember that the man who got the papers is on the other side of that door. I mean to have those papers."

Presently the voices stopped, and it became evident that the men had gone to bed.

Then Nick applied his picklock and pushed the door open.

A dim light, shining in from the street, revealed the fact that the room contained no bed or couch of any kind.

The detectives turned toward a side room, pushed aside a curtain, and found themselves looking down the shining barrels of two revolvers.

"I thought you'd come here," said Clarence, with a brutal grin. "I knew you were following me."

CHAPTER V.

MR. JAMES MOLONEY IS MURDERED.

"Rush in, boys!" shouted Nick, never taking his eyes from those of Clarence.

For a single instant Clarence and his companion turned their eyes and the muzzles of their revolvers toward the door.

"I'll shoot the first man that shows his head inside the door," said Clarence.

But there was no movement at the door, for there was no one there.

Instantly Nick and Chick leaped forward, and the men were hurled back.

Clarence's revolver was knocked from his hand by a blow which almost broke his wrist, and he lay helpless on the floor, in the power of Nick Carter.

Chick had been equally successful with Andy, and the irons were soon on the wrists of both men.

"We didn't come to Toledo for the purpose of being captured or murdered," said Nick, rising to his feet.

"At least not by such bunglers as these men seem to be," added the assistant.

Clarence arose to a sitting position, and glared angrily about.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

"It means," was the reply, "that you are under arrest for the murder of Robert Weldon."

The fellow did not appear to be in the least alarmed at the information. He looked the detective in the face and laughed.

"If that is all," he said, "I have nothing to fear."

"Perhaps you did not do the shooting," said Nick, "but you stole the papers, and no one who did not want Weldon out of the way would have done that."

"I think," said Clarence, with a smile, "that you had better give up detective work and go and saw wood for a living."

"You're a cool duck," said Chick.

"What are you going to do with us?" asked Andy.

"Take you to the police station," replied Nick.

"Well, hurry up, then," said Clarence. "I want to let my friends know where I am, so I can get bail."

"You will not be admitted to bail," replied Nick.

"If you will talk with me alone for a few minutes," replied Clarence, "I can convince you that I will be admitted to bail."

The detective took the fellow into the next room and drew the heavy curtain.

"Now, tell your story," he said.

Fifteen minutes later, when the two men joined Chick and Andy in the main room, Clarence was smiling, and Nick looked like a man who had lost his best friend.

"The fellow is right," said the latter. "We would better go out and look for wood to saw."

"What's up?" asked Chick.

"Time's up, for one thing," replied Nick, "and we may as well get these men to the station at once."

"On what charge?" demanded Clarence.

"Larceny," said Nick, shortly.

"All you can charge me with," said Andy, "is rooming with this man."

Nick had no difficulty in getting the police officers to take charge of the prisoners, and then the detectives went to their room at the hotel.

"Now," said Chick, as the two men lit cigars, "perhaps you can throw a little light on this case. What's up?"

"Moloney!"

Chick threw a book at his chief's head, and laughed heartily.

"You remember what I said about the wheels," he said.

"Moloney," said Nick, "who has been mentioned once or twice before in this case, has paid up his back assessments, and is on the warpath."

"When did he pay up?"

"Last Tuesday; at least, that is what Clarence said."

"After the murder?"

"Yes, after the murder."

"Dixon does not know this?"

"No; his daughter does not know, either."

"How did Clarence find out about it?"

"He took one of the old man's letters from the postoffice and opened it. He don't want the old man to know."

"Another case against him, one for opening letters."

"Yes, but it don't help us any."

"He's a cool chap," said Chick. "Did he apologize for giving you that slash across the hand?"

"The idiot denies having done it. He even says he never saw the papers. He says he was not at the Weldon house."

"Of course he lies."

"Of course he does. If he had given up the papers he would not have been locked up."

"What is his interest in this case, anyway?"

"He expects to get hold of the money by marrying Dixon's daughter. Great scheme, eh?"

"I should say so."

"He knew of Weldon's death on Monday," said Nick; "on Wednesday he learned that Moloney had paid up and was a competitor for the money, and on Wednesday night stole the papers to keep them out of the old man's hands."

"Why out of the old man's hands?"

"Because Dixon would have destroyed them. He lives in constant fear of Moloney, and would, at his demand, surrender all interest in the sixty thousand dollars."

"Then there is something between the two men which does not appear on the surface."

"Most undoubtedly."

"Well," said Chick, "we've got to find Moloney now."

"We've got to do more than that," said Nick. "We've got to connect him with the murder. There is not a line of proof against him at the present moment."

"That means an entirely new beginning," said Chick.

"Practically," was the reply.

"Still," said Chick, "we have found a motive for the murder. Who would have thought of connecting that quiet farmer with such a combination of circumstances?"

"We shall find a stranger combination yet," said Nick. "Before we are done with the case. Moloney seems to be a pink."

"What has he done so very bright?"

"He has murdered Hayden, Reed and Weldon," was the reply. "You must admit that that is something, when you consider that suspicion has never been directed toward him."

Chick sprang to his feet.

"You are right about his being a pink," he said. "In every one of the cases he has directed suspicion toward Dixon and his daughter. Remember the resemblance between the young woman in New York and the daughter of the old man."

"I thought you'd get to that," said Nick.

"But I went too far," said Chick, "in saying that all the cases pointed toward the Dixons."

"You were right," replied Nick. "The man who murdered Weldon walked with a limp in the right leg, had sandy hair and whiskers, and wore a Grand Army badge. If Clarence did not murder Weldon, the man who did it was made up to represent him."

"How do you know all this?"

"By the foot-marks between the house and the barn, by the sandy hair, and the ravelings from the badge found in the stable, where he had the struggle with the horse."

"Did he leave his pension papers there?" asked Chick, with a smile.

"No, but he left part of an envelope bearing the stamp of the commissioner of pensions—purposely left it, in order to make the case against the lover of Dixon's daughter seem all the stronger."

"Moloney does seem to be a brick," commented Chick.

"And he has some hold on Dixon," said Nick. "I am anxious to find out what it is."

After some further talk, the detectives went to bed, and slept very soundly until morning.

At nine o'clock the next day they were at the police station.

"How are the prisoners I brought here last night?" asked Nick of the chief, after presenting his card.

"Nick Carter!" exclaimed the chief, bustling about the room. "This is indeed a great honor! I have always wanted to meet you."

Nick bowed, and the chief summoned a man from the turnkey's room on the first floor.

"Bring up the two men these officers left here last night," he said, when the officer made his appearance.

"Something strange happened here last night," said the turnkey.

"Just after the men were locked up a woman came here and asked to see one of them."

"What sort of a woman?" asked Nick.

"A young, smallish woman, with black hair and eyes."

"Was she allowed to see him?"

"Yes; the night man very foolishly permitted an interview," was the hesitating reply.

"Did any one hear what was said?"

"No."

"Well?"

"When the woman went out, the officer in charge thought he saw a package of papers in her hand and called to her to return, but, instead of doing so, she took to her heels and ran away."

"And the officer failed to catch her?" demanded the chief.

"He says she absolutely disappeared the moment she left the door."

"Were the prisoners searched?" asked the chief.

"Yes, but only for weapons," was the reply.

Nick arose to go.

"You needn't bring the men up at present," he said.

"There go the papers," said Chick, as soon as the detectives were out of the chief's office.

"I suppose so, and now the question is, what will the girl do with them?"

"Where are you going?" asked Chick.

"I am going to have a talk with that girl," was the reply. "I want to know how she found out that Clarence was under arrest."

"Shall I go with you?"

"No. Go back to the hotel and wait for me."

The detective hastened to the building where he had seen the girl on the previous evening, and hastened upstairs.

The door was locked, and there was no sound of life in the room.

While Nick stood pounding on the door a man came out of the coal room.

"You needn't wait there," he said. "Dixon and his daughter moved away early this morning."

"Where did they go?" asked Nick.

"I don't know."

"Do you belong here?"

"Yes; I am the janitor."

"Then, perhaps, you can tell me something about the Dixon people," said Nick.

"I know nothing about them."

"How long ago did they move here?"

"Six months."

"What is his business?"

"I didn't know that he had any."

"How did they go?"

"In a hack."

"Then they are probably still in the city?"

"I can't say. They were packing all night, and their furniture looked to me as if it had been put up for a long journey."

Nick went downstairs and walked up and down the street, trying to figure it out.

Finally he went to the hotel and sat down by the side of his assistant, who was smoking in the office.

"They have skipped us," he said, "and we shall have to rent the rooms they occupied. They may have left something there which will furnish a clew to their whereabouts."

"I see," replied Chick, with a provoking laugh, "they are fleeing from Moloney."

"That's what I imagine," replied Nick.

"And the girl has the papers?"

"I suppose so. They, the girl and her lover, are determined to keep them out of the reach of the father."

"Well," said Chick; "I'd like to know the truth about Dixon's relations with Moloney. That might help us."

"We shall never know until we catch Moloney, or get Dixon to talking," was the reply.

"Don't Clarence know?"

"No. He wonders over it as much as we do. He only knows that the money will soon go to the girl, by reason of the death of her father, if Moloney can only be kept out of the way. His sole interest in the matter lies in that part of it. He is about disgusted, now that Moloney has made his payments, for Dixon can't live long, the way he takes morphine, so Moloney may get the money in the course of a year or so."

"It does not seem as if a girl like that would marry a loafer like Clarence. By the way, what is his other name?"

"I don't know what his other name is. You can never tell what a girl will do."

"We had better let him go," said Chick.

"Why?"

"I have an idea that he would kill Moloney on sight. Then we could have him hanged for the crime. That, you see, would end the whole matter nicely."

"He might do that, for Moloney seems about to knock out his chances for getting the money."

the girl. I don't think he will marry the girl until she gets the money. Well, we'll release him and take him in again after he finds Dixon for us."

"Suppose we go and talk with him. He may have an idea where Moloney is. Of course, he won't tell us where Dixon and his daughter have gone. We must follow him to learn that."

Before going out of the hotel, Nick stepped up to the register and carelessly ran down the list of new arrivals.

In a moment he called Chick to his side and pointed to a name on the page.

There in very black ink, and in a very rough hand, was the entry:

"James W. Moloney, Chicago."

"That knocks me out," said Chick.

"I imagine it would knock any one out," replied Nick. "What do you make of it?"

"He has come here to look after Dixon's health."

"And Dixon knew it, and moved away?"

"I think so," said Chick.

"Well," said Nick, "we wanted Dixon, and he presented himself; we wanted the big blonde, and he showed up without trouble; we wanted Moloney, and here he is."

"It is a strange case, and yet we are coming nearer to the truth all the time."

"Yes, and we have had very little knocking so far."

"That will probably come in time," said Chick.

The detective turned to the clerk.

"Do you know where Moloney is?" he asked.

The clerk cast his eye over the men sitting in the office, and pointed to one of them with his pen.

"There he sits," he said.

At that moment a slightly-built young man, with blonde hair and a pair of gold eyeglasses, stepped up to the register and looked it over.

Then he glanced around the room and walked out.

"That fellow," said Nick, "wears a wig."

"I didn't notice that," said Chick.

Nick walked up to Moloney and held a short conversation with him.

Then he beckoned Chick outside.

"Is the man we have been talking about," he

"that he has been in Europe for seven years?"

"Yes."

"Here goes the Moloney end of the scheme,"

said Nick. "I shall begin to think, before long, that Weldon is still alive."

"Do you know," asked Chick, with a smile, "where we can secure a good job sawing wood—nice soft wood?"

"I am not going to hire out just yet," replied Nick. "I'm going down and release Clarence. The girl has the papers, so it's no use holding him; and, besides, I want to set him on Moloney."

Clarence turned pale when he learned that Moloney was in the city.

He refused to say anything about the girl who had taken the papers the night before, but Nick released him, intending to keep him in sight.

Chick, disguised as a hackman, sat outside ready to follow the fellow, and so Nick went back to the hotel.

There he procured a map of the city, and prepared to make a thorough search for Madge Dixon.

He believed her to be still in the city, and had an idea that her lover would go straight to her; still he was working two ropes.

If Chick did not find her by following Clarence, he might by making a systematic search. Then Clarence would be arrested again.

Soon after dinner he heard a rush of feet on the stairs, and then loud cries of horror and fear rang through the hotel.

"What is it?" demanded the clerk, leaving his desk and his dignity at the same moment.

"Murder!"

Nick bounded upstairs.

The hall was full of people, and the door of one of the rooms was wide open.

This room seemed to be the point of interest.

The detective hastened inside.

There, on the floor, with a knife in his heart, and the blood forming a red pool about him, lay James W. Moloney!

He was quite dead.

"Who did it?" demanded the clerk, bustling into the room.

"I don't know, sir," sobbed one of the chambermaids. "I was passing the room when I heard a cry. The next moment the door opened and a young woman ran out:

"What sort of a woman?" demanded Nick.

"A slender woman, with light hair."

"Which way did she go?"

"Down the back way. I tried to stop her, but was not quick enough; she ran so fast."

Another chambermaid stepped forward.

"Light hair, nothing," she said. "She wore a wig, and it fell off back there. Her hair was as black as—as midnight."

She produced the wig as she spoke.

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW CHARACTER PRESENTS HERSELF.

The detective took the wig and examined it carefully.

It was of the same color and texture as the one worn by the young man in the forenoon.

He was about to leave the room, when Chick made his appearance.

Nick called him away to their room, and explained what had taken place.

"Now," he added, "before you express any opinion, tell me what you have discovered. Have you rearrested Clarence yet?"

"No," replied Chick; "I got the fellow into my hack. He traveled all over the city, as if to elude pursuit, and he finally ordered me to drive to a house away out on Dorr street."

"Yes?"

"There he got out and dismissed me. When the door was opened I saw a woman answering to the description of Miss Dixon."

"Good."

"I drove to the next corner, hitched the team, and watched the house."

"In a few moments a boy came out and chased away after another hack."

"Did you offer yourself again?"

"No; I did not know what he wanted until he came back with another hack. A man and a woman got into the vehicle and drove away."

"And you followed them?"

"Yes. They chased around town for an hour or so and then went to a house near this hotel."

"The plot deepens," said Nick.

"I waited on the next corner, until a few moments ago, and then came straight here."

"You thought they had escaped?" asked Nick, excitedly.

"I was sure of it, though how they ever got out of the house is more than I know."

"Well," said Nick; "we at least know where the girl went."

"Where?"

"She came here and murdered James W. Moloney. What do you say to that?"

"It is very probable."

Nick laughed.

"I caught you in my trap," he said. "Madge Dixon never killed the man lying dead upstairs."

"Not kill Moloney if she got a chance—after all you heard her say about him last night!"

"I don't think she did."

"Then who did?"

"That I can't say at present," was the reply, "but I have a faint suspicion. Do you think you can find Clarence again?"

"Find him? I've got to find him!"

"Fix up in some way, and go to the house he visited this forenoon; also the house to which you trailed him last."

"And if I find him?"

"Arrest him. If he fights, kill him. He is the man we want."

"Perhaps I had better go to the last house first," suggested the assistant.

"That is a good idea," replied Nick. "The woman may have gone there after committing the murder."

Chick hastened away, and Nick began a thorough search of the room where the murder had been committed, presumably under the direction of the chief of police, who had arrived upon the scene.

One of the first things he discovered was a sheet of paper covered with figures.

The total of the figuring was sixty-one thousand dollars, and the figures were in a man's writing.

"They were talking about the club," thought Nick. "That is probably the way the woman interested him."

The knife with which the murder had been committed was of foreign manufacture.

"He was murdered with his own weapon," thought Nick.

The detective spent the afternoon about the hotel, waiting for word from Chick.

About six o'clock he was sitting in the office, when he felt himself touched lightly on the shoulder.

He turned, to find Richard Dixon standing behind him.

The old man was very pale, and he was trembling violently.

"You are the man I talked with last night," he said; "that is why I address you. I am too weak to make in person the inquiries I wish made. Will you aid me?"

Nick took the old man by the arm and led him to his room.

"Now, tell me what you want," he said.

"I bought a paper just now," said the old man, "and I saw in it an account of a murder in this hotel. Will you tell me who was killed?"

"Yes; it was James W. Moloney, the man we talked about last night."

The old man shuddered.

"I hadn't the strength to read the paper," he said; "tell me about the murder, if you please."

Nick did as requested, laying particular stress upon the description of the girl.

"Do you think she did it?" asked Dixon.

"Yes."

Dixon bowed his face in his hands, and fairly sobbed.

"I am in great trouble," he said. "I left my old quarters this morning for reasons best known to myself, and since that time I have not seen my daughter."

The detective started to his feet.

"Tell me why you left the old rooms," he said.

"To get my daughter away from one Clarence Cummings, who pretends to love her. I am afraid I failed, for she is probably with him at this moment."

"She was very nervous about this man Moloney," said Nick. "Do you think she could have been induced to kill him?"

"Under Clarence's directions, I don't know what she might do."

"Why were you both so fearful of Moloney?"

The old man trembled and sobbed, and finally replied:

"One night in Washington, when I was without money and full of liquor, we conspired together to murder the living members of the club and divide the money."

"I see."

"When I became sober I regretted what I had done, and left the city. He followed me to Chicago,

and declared that the work of murder should go on, and that I should take my chances with the rest."

"Well, did you report the matter to the officers?"

"No; we had drawn up an agreement which would have implicated me. My lips were closed. Since that time three members have been murdered, and I have not dared to say a word. It is horrible."

"And your daughter knew this?"

"Yes."

"And she told her lover?"

"I fear so."

"And at least two of the murders have been committed by a woman resembling your daughter?"

"Yes, it seems so."

"I don't mean that the woman struck the blow in all the cases," said Nick, "but she has appeared in every case except that of the man Weldon."

"Yet she is innocent," said the old man, "for she was with me when Hayden and Reed were murdered."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sure. If she has killed Moloney, it was to protect me."

Nick remained silent for a moment, and then said:

"Moloney was in Europe when Hayden and Reed were murdered."

Dixon bounded out of his chair and seized Nick by the arm.

"How do you know that?" he demanded.

"I saw proof of the fact in his hands to-day, but a short time before he was murdered."

"Then who committed the murders?"

Nick drew nearer to the old man, and whispered in his ear.

Dixon fell back in his chair.

"My God," he said, "it can't be possible."

"But there can be no doubt of it."

"Who are you?" asked the old man.

"Nick Carter."

"Then you must be right."

"We shall know before long," said Nick. "I am waiting now for my assistant to report."

"Where has he gone?"

"In search of Clarence."

"I hope and pray he will not find my daughter with him," said the old man. "Do you think he will?"

"I am afraid so," replied Nick, sorrowfully.

"I have always warned her against that man," said Dixon. "See what has come of her disobedience."

"We will believe nothing, take nothing for granted," said Nick, "until we find them."

"I am afraid Madge has been with Clarence a great deal lately," said the old man. "I have not been in a condition to know much about her doings."

"She was with him last night," said Nick, "and I heard all that passed between them."

It grew dark while they talked, and the detective became anxious about Chick.

But the assistant was quite busy about that time. After leaving his chief, he went to the house where he had last seen Clarence and the woman.

Inquiries made of a policeman posted him in regard to the place.

It was a boarding-house, with a very tough reputation.

He went into a convenient hallway, which for the moment chanced to be deserted, and came out looking like a Bowery tough.

Then he knocked boldly at the door of the house, and after being closely scrutinized, was admitted.

"What do you want?" asked the vinegar-faced woman who had admitted him.

"Board."

"Who sent you here?"

"Man down at a s'loon," was the reply, in the choicest dialect of the Bowery.

"Then you've got money, I suppose?"

Chick took out a ten-dollar bill.

"I've got money to burn," he said, "an' some folks would like ter know how I get it. See?"

"I see," said the woman. "You'd better have a room on the top floor. It's quieter there."

Chick was shown to an apartment at the rear of the building, on the second floor.

Below the window was a little alley, and the heart of the detective gave a sudden leap as he saw a hack standing there.

"The people I want are here," he thought.

In a moment he heard a door in the hall open, and a woman's voice said:

"Who is the man in the next room?"

"Some fellow who wants to keep out of the way for a spell," replied the landlady's voice.

Then the door closed, and the woman went away.

It was evident that the people were in the room next to the one occupied by the detective.

Slowly and carefully, Chick began boring a hole through the lath and plaster wall with the blade of a knife.

It did not take him long to cut through the half of the wall on his side, and then he began to remove the plaster which obstructed his view of the other room.

"What's that noise?" asked Clarence.

"Mice," was the reply. "They are very thick in this old trap of a house. I hope we shall soon be out of it."

"Don't let them eat the papers," said Clarence.

"I have the papers under my corset," was the answer.

"How did you find me last night?" asked Clarence.

"I was just going to your room when the detectives took you to the station," was the reply.

"Are you certain no one followed you here?"

"Yes; they were all too busy finding out what had taken place in Moloney's room."

"It's strange where Dixon went," said Clarence, in a moment.

"We must find him," said the woman. "We get the money as soon as he dies."

"We may have to help him die."

"No. There must be no murder to investigate when the papers are presented at the bank."

"You are right."

"And you must go through the form of marrying the girl."

"I suppose so."

"Well, it won't take you long to get the money after she has it in her possession, and then all our work will be rewarded."

"Yes; we have had a hard time of it," replied Clarence.

"Bah!" said the woman, contemptuously, "what have you done?"

"Planned the whole thing."

"Your planning did little good in the cases of Hayden and Reed. I had to fall back upon my own resources."

"You have acted nobly," was the reply.

Chick drew away from the slight opening and stood in the center of the room with a look of complete satisfaction on his face.

"The case is made," he thought. "Now, how shall I get Nick here?"

That was indeed a puzzler.

Clarence and the woman were doubtless armed, and the house was, of course, filled with toughs who would not hesitate to murder a man who should attempt to make an arrest there.

Finally he opened his window and leaned out.

The hackman stood by the door of his vehicle, and he beckoned to him to come to his room.

In a moment he heard him knocking at his door.

He opened it to find Clarence and the woman looking out of the doorway of their room.

"What are you doing with our hackman?" demanded the former.

"I want to use him for five minutes," replied Chick. "Have you any objections?"

"Not if you pay him well, and he gets back here before dark."

"All right," replied Chick, motioning to the hackman to follow him down stairs.

"Now," said the detective, when they both stood in the alley, "I want to go to that hotel around the corner. I've got a pal there."

"Get in."

The hackman was evidently familiar with tough-looking chaps who had "pals."

At least that is what Chick thought.

He had not observed a signal which passed between Clarence and the hackman.

When Chick sat down in the hack he noticed that it was very close, and tried to let down the window.

Failing in this, he made an effort to open one of the doors, but did not succeed.

Both doors were locked in some mysterious manner.

Then the detective began to notice a peculiar odor in the vehicle.

In a moment he discovered what it was.

It was ether.

Then Chick saw a small tube protruding from the side of the hack next to the driver's seat.

The hackman, from some sort of reservoir under his control, was filling the hack with the deadly stuff.

Chick raised his foot to break through the glass door, but found that he was too weak to do so.

The next moment he fell back in the seat, unconscious.

The hackman took him a long way out in the country, and left him by the side of the road.

"He looks like a decent chap," muttered the jehu, "but Clarence and his woman got it in for him because he saw them together in that house. He'll be all right in a short time, the people will get out of the house, and everything will be lovely."

The hackman left Chick lying by the side of a fence, and drove rapidly back to the house.

When Chick regained consciousness some one was pouring very bad whisky down his throat.

He tried to get up, but was held down.

"Keep still, podner," said a rough voice. "You got knocked out—I hope it was on account of a square meal—an' lay down here too long. Take another drink?"

Chick pushed the tramp aside and got up.

His first thought was to feel in his pockets and see if he had been robbed.

Nothing had been taken.

"How far am I from town?" he asked.

"'Bout t'ree miles."

"Street car near here?"

"Right over there."

The detective threw the tramp a dollar, and bounded over the fence toward a street car, which was passing along only a few rods away.

The last he saw of the tramp he stood looking at the dollar as if it had dropped from the clouds.

The street car belonged to a suburban line, and ran very slowly, and it was dark when Chick got back to the hotel.

He found Nick waiting for him, Dixon having gone home.

In a few words he told just what had happened.

Nick laughed heartily at the disgusted look on his assistant's countenance.

"I have had just such luck before now," he said, "and if you worry about it I'll have to give you a thumping. We can catch them yet."

"I doubt it."

"They think you're out of the way," replied Nick, "and won't leave the place until it gets darker than it is now. Come on."

The two detectives were soon at the boarding-house, and both crept softly upstairs, without knocking.

The door of the room Clarence had occupied was open, and they could see that it was empty.

Then voices in the room Chick had had attracted their attention.

"See," said the woman, "he was spying on us. We did well to get him out of the way."

"We ought to have heard him cutting that hole," said Clarence.

"We did, and thought the noise was made by mice."

The detectives opened the door, and confronted the pair with revolvers in their hands.

"If you make a move, or try to call help," said Nick, "I'll blow your head off. You are under arrest for murdering Hayden, Reed, Weldon and Moloney."

They both weakened.

In five minutes they were out of the house, and in ten minutes more were at the police station.

The woman gave her name as Elsie Cummings.

"The wife of that man?" asked Nick.

"Yes."

"Why did you dress so as to represent Madge Dixon?" was the next question.

"Because I wanted to throw suspicion on her."

"Why?"

"To get her into Clarence's power."

"And you succeeded?"

"Yes. She thought he was preventing her from being persecuted by the officers because of the murders. Where is she?"

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"I guess she is hiding to escape from me," said Clarence.

"Now, then," said Nick, "which one of you murdered Robert Weldon?"

The woman pointed toward Clarence.

"But," said Nick, "I heard his roommate talk-

ing about his being in Toledo on the night of the murder."

"Yes, he told his roommate he was with me that night, and even told him what we talked about, so as to throw him off the track in case he began to suspect anything."

"How did you get to the Weldon house?" asked Nick, turning to the trembling prisoner.

"I went there after dark, on a horse," was the reply. "The horse went lame, and I had to take one from the barn."

"Then your roommate was not in with the scheme?"

"No."

At that moment the door of the turnkey's room opened, and Robert Dixon and his daughter entered.

Both started back when they saw Clarence and the feminine counterpart of Madge.

"The girl heard of Moloney's murder and came home," said the old man, briefly.

"The case is closed," said Nick, "and the murderers of Hayden, Reed, Weldon and Moloney are before you."

"Why shouldn't we murder Moloney?" demanded the woman. "We had moved heaven and earth to get the fortune, and when we were about to grasp it, by way of Clarence's marriage with the weakfaced girl, Moloney made his appearance. It was too provoking."

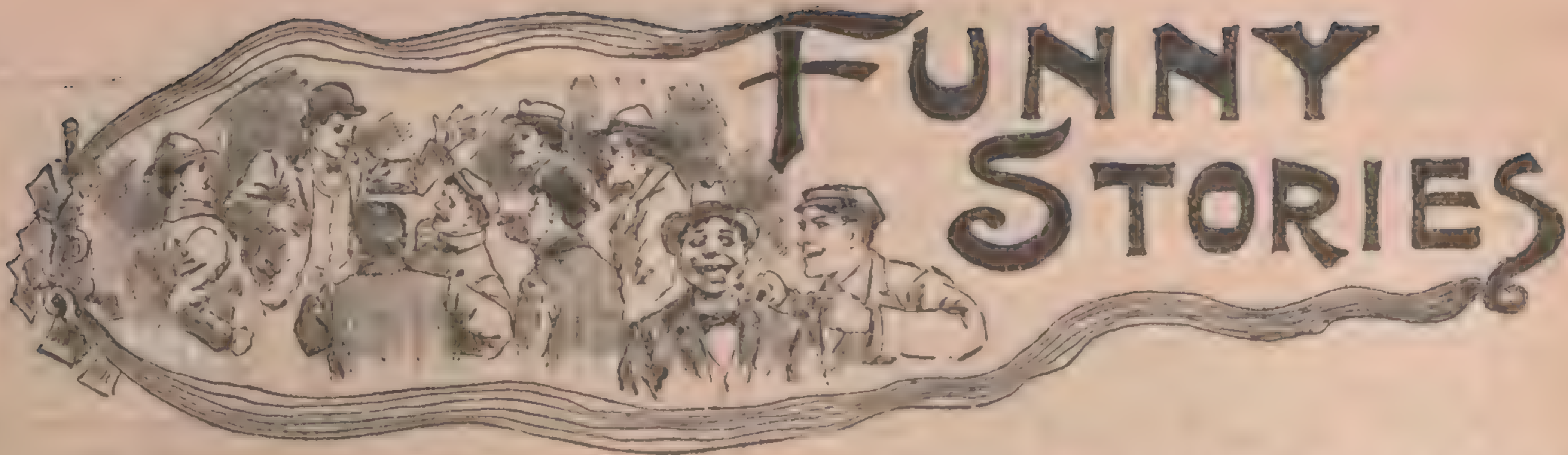
The two detectives turned away, accompanied by Dixon and his daughter, the latter looking brighter and fresher than she had for months.

Clarence and Elsie pleaded guilty to murder in the first degree, and were executed.

Dixon received the fortune held in trust by the bank, and the little boy secured the property of his murdered father and mother.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 285) will contain: Nick Carter's Chinese Puzzle; or, Patsy's Little Game. A rattling story of thrilling detective work, boys.



Hold your sides, boys! You're in for a lot more laughter yet in this contest. We've got a pile of jokes on hand funny enough to make a wooden Indian in front of a cigar store drop his hatchet and crack his paint trying to smile. Get ready for them, for they are going to be printed. Full particulars of this contest on page 30.

A Talk Over the Wires.

(By N. G. Chandler, Me.)

A subscriber to the Telephone Exchange asked to be placed in communication with his medical man.

Subscriber: "My wife complains of a severe pain at the back of the neck, and occasional nausea."

Doctor: "She must have malaria."

Subscriber: "What is best to be done?"

At this moment the clerk at the central station altered the switch by mistake, and the unlucky husband receives the reply of a mechanical engineer in answer to inquiries of a mill owner.

Engineer: "I believe the inside is lined with excoriations to a considerable thickness. Let her cool during the night, and in the morning before firing up, take a hammer and pound her vigorously. Then get a garden hose with a strong pressure from the main and let it play freely on the parts affected."

To his great surprise, the doctor never saw his client again.

Hard Luck.

(By J. L. Hughes, Tex.)

Last summer I got the traveling fever and thought I would take a trip on the car-boxes, so I got an old friend of mine whose name is Sam Owensby, and we struck out for Fort Smith. We had a little money when we left here and less when we got there. So when this was all gone I proposed that we try our hand at bumming handouts. After a few minutes' walking we spotted a house which we thought we could get something to eat at, so we both walked up to the front door and knocked, but no sooner had we done this than a vicious looking dog came running round the corner of the house. Now, that scared us, and we started running around that house, with that dog right at our heels. Round and round the house we went till we were pretty tired, and as we were passing the front door the twelfth time a woman stuck her head out and said, "Is there anything that I can do for you, boys?" Sam yelled back.

"Yes, please have the gate open by the time we get around again." We finally got out of there minus part of our pants and went on down the street till we struck

another house. So we goes up, knocks on the door, the lady came, and Sam said:

"Lady, will you please give us something to eat, we are so hungry we could eat the jams off the door casing." She referred us to the woodhouse, saying that there were plenty of chops but there. We didn't like that, so we went on to the next house, the lady came to the door, and we gave her the same speil, and she says to me:

"What profession do you follow?"

I told her that I was a walking delegate for the non-laboring association. Then she says to Sam:

"What profession do you follow?"

Sam says:

"I am an acrobat."

"All right," says she, "you can go out to the woodhouse and do the split; then I will give you something to eat." Sam did the split all right, then we went to get our grub. She handed up two slices of bread with the remark, "This is for God's sake."

"Then for our sake," says I, "put a little butter on it."

She put the butter on, and we went to another house.

The lady in this place handed us two slices of bread as thin as tissue paper. We took them, and I said:

"Lady, please loan me your razor."

"My!" she cried, in excitement, "I haven't any razor."

"Then please tell me what you cut this bread with."

Short Stories.

(By Howard Sturgis, Ill.)

One night I went to a banquet, and on getting up next morning I felt so sick that I sent for a doctor. He came, bringing his satchel, and after looking me over gave me a powder. As he was about to go, I gave him a two-dollar bill. He took it, but gave me no change. The next day he called again and gave me another powder and I gave him another two dollar-bill, but there was no change. The third day he visited me he felt my pulse and looked at my tongue, but when he wasn't looking I slipped my hand into his pocket.

After he had finished his inspection he said

"Well, you ought to be getting better, don't you feel any change?"

"Oh, yes, doctor," I replied, "but not as much as I expected."

"Well, I suppose you are not feeling very well," he said.

I am stopping at a boarding-house now, and the other evening as I was sitting on the porch I overheard two soldiers discussing a battle which they had been in. One of the other men sitting near interrupted them.

"Aw, go on," said one of the soldiers, "you weren't there, what do you know about it, anyway, you never saw any bombarding."

"Maybe not," replied the man, "but since I've been staying here I've seen plenty of bum boarding."

About four o'clock one afternoon a rather dilapidated-looking man entered one of the swell Chicago hotels. He walked up to the head clerk and asked to see the manager. The clerk called a porter and told him to show the gentleman to the billiard-room on the second floor where the manager was playing billiards. The porter showed him to the room and pointed out the manager. The man walked up to the manager and spoke to him. The manager took small leather piece from the tip of the cue he held in his hand and said:

"Take a tip and get out of here."

The man looked rather abashed, took the tip handed to him and walked out. At the head of the stairs he met the porter to whom he gave the tip for showing him up, but the porter threw him down the stairs, while he was rolling down he met a man coming up who asked him what he was doing.

"Looking for a place to stop," he said.

"Why don't you stop here?" asked the man.

"Nope—too steep," he answered.

Two Rib Ticklers.

(By C. De Boupa, Maryland.)

Colonel B——, who was very fat, was accosted by a man to whom he owed money with a "How do ye do?"

"Pretty well, I thank you. You find I hold my own."

"Yes," rejoined the other, "and mine, too, to my sorrow."

A milkman's lad on delivering his milk a few mornings ago was asked by a lady why the milk was so warm.

"I don't know," he replied, with much simplicity, "unless they put in warm water instead of cold."

The Only Way.

(By Ed. Collins, Ohio.)

Two tramps were discussing as to how they might earn a living. The discussion became heated, and one turned to the other, exclaiming:

"The only thing you are fit for is for me to lead around the street as a performing monkey tied to a string."

"But," said the other, quietly, "you would want another man."

"Why?" said the first.

"To point out at which end of the string the monkey was."

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*There is a good chance for every
boy in our new*

Funny Story Contest

YOU ALL KNOW what rattling funny stories we printed in the recent contests. We are following them with another of the same kind. You have just as good a chance in this contest as any other boy in America, whether you entered the other contest or not. We want

More Funny Stories

Think of the funniest story of which you have ever heard, or the best joke. Write it out and send it to us—then look out for funny stories. We are publishing in this contest some of the best side-splitters that ever came out of the joke factory. Remember the prizes we are offering. In this contest there are

Fifty New Prizes

FIVE FIRST PRIZES The five boys who send in the five funniest stories will each receive **TEN BOOKS** from the list given in No. 280. The list includes some of the best detective stories, tales of adventure, and most interesting boys' stories ever written.

TEN SECOND PRIZES The ten boys who send in the next funniest stories will each receive any **FOUR BOOKS** they may select in the list in No. 280.

FIFTEEN THIRD PRIZES The fifteen boys who send us the next funniest stories will each receive any **THREE BOOKS** they may select in the list in No. 280. The twenty boys who send in next funniest stories will receive any **TWO BOOKS** they may select in the list in No. 280.

HERE ARE THE DIRECTIONS

This contest will close **September 1st**. Remember, whether your story wins a prize or not, it stands a good chance of being published, together with your name.

To become a contestant for these prizes you must cut out the Prize Contest Coupon printed herewith, fill it out properly, and mail it to **NICK CARTER WEEKLY**, care of Street & Smith, 238 William St., New York City, together with your story. No story will be considered that does not have this coupon accompanying it.

COUPON

NICK CARTER WEEKLY PRIZE CONTEST No. 3.

Name

Street and Number

City or Town

State

Title of Story

Amateur Detective Work.

Boys, in reading one of the Nick Carter stories did you ever try to think ahead and guess who was the criminal in the case?

Each of the readers has a chance to find out how good a detective he is.

He has the facts of the case laid before him just as Nick Carter himself has.

Of course, he has not got Nick's experience or wonderful detective instinct. Still, he can prove whether or not he is a good detective by trying to decide in his own mind what the solution of the mystery is before he has read to the end of the story. The earlier in the story he is able to make his guess and the more accurate it is, the better detective he is.

We want to see what sort of detectives the readers of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY are.

We want one and all of you to write to us, telling us whether you were able to solve the mystery that Nick Carter had to solve before reading to the end of any of the stories.

Tell us how far you read before you arrived at your decision, and *just what points guided you in making your decision.* Your letters will be printed in this column.

BLAIRSTOWN, Iowa, May 2, 1902.

Dear Sir: I am a reader of the Nick Carter Weekly and have been for years. I saw your amateur detective work, so I thought I would try and see what kind of a detective I am.

I took No. 277, or "Nick Carter and the Professor." When Fielding told Nick that Dr. Drummond wanted to see him as soon as the doctor's name was brought in I suspected him of having something to do with the ghouls. Then when Lucy was taken I thought at once that the doctor had his confederates take her.

Three cheers for the Carters! WILLIE CLUETT.

Bravo, Willie. Three cheers for the Carters, by all means. They deserve them, don't they? Write again.

BUFFALO, N. Y.

Editor Nick Carter Weekly—

Dear Sir: I am just reading "Nick Carter and the Professor" and I want to write how I solved this prob-

lem. I reasoned that two toughs would not steal a corpse for their own sake. There was somebody who prompted them to do it. As it was later shown that the father had no enemies, it must have been a medical student who desired the body. When I saw how desirous the professor was of meeting Nick Carter, and later how he tried to impress upon Nick an absurd fact about the coachman, I knew that the professor had something to do with the case.

Then, again, the fact that Taylor was seen to go into the professor's house and the attempt to kill Nick in front of the house, the disappearance of Lucy, the professor's anxiety over this fact, all led me to believe that Drummond, if not the chief criminal, was one of the perpetrators of the crime.

Respectfully yours,

FRANKLIN PARKER.

Good work. You are a corking detective, Franklin. You show that you have first-rate reasoning powers. We accept you as a worthy member of the Nick Carter Amateur Detective League.

An Essay On Dogs.

(By E. M. Schemerhorn, N. Y.)

Last summer our dog Towser was a lyin' in the sun tryin' to sleep, but he couldn't fer the flies were that bad he had to catch them and bime by a bee lit on his head and was working about like the dog was hisn. Towser he held his head still and when the bee was close to his nose Towser winked at him, like he sed you see what this buffer's doing, he thinks I'm a lily-of-the-valley, which isn't opened yet, but you just wait till I blossom and you will see some fun.


Sure enuff, Towser opened his mouth very slow so as not to friten the bee, and the bee went into Towser's mouth. Then Towser he shet his eyes and mouth and had begun to make a peaceful smile when the bee up and stung him and you never saw a lily-of-the-valley act so in your life.

In the Same Fix.

(By Eugene Hammond, Ala.)

Once there was a lady that owned a very mean parrot. One day the lady stepped out to her neighbor's, and left a can of tripe on the table, that she had just opened to cook for dinner. The parrot, coming in the kitchen, saw the tripe, ate what he wanted of it and threw the rest on the floor. The lady, on coming back, after she saw what the parrot had done, caught him, whipped him, and pulled all of the feathers out of his head, so that poll was entirely bald-headed. That day the preacher came to dine with the lady. As the preacher was praying at the table, Poll noticed that the preacher was bald-headed as well as himself. Looking at him he said:

"Hello! have you been eating tripe, too?"

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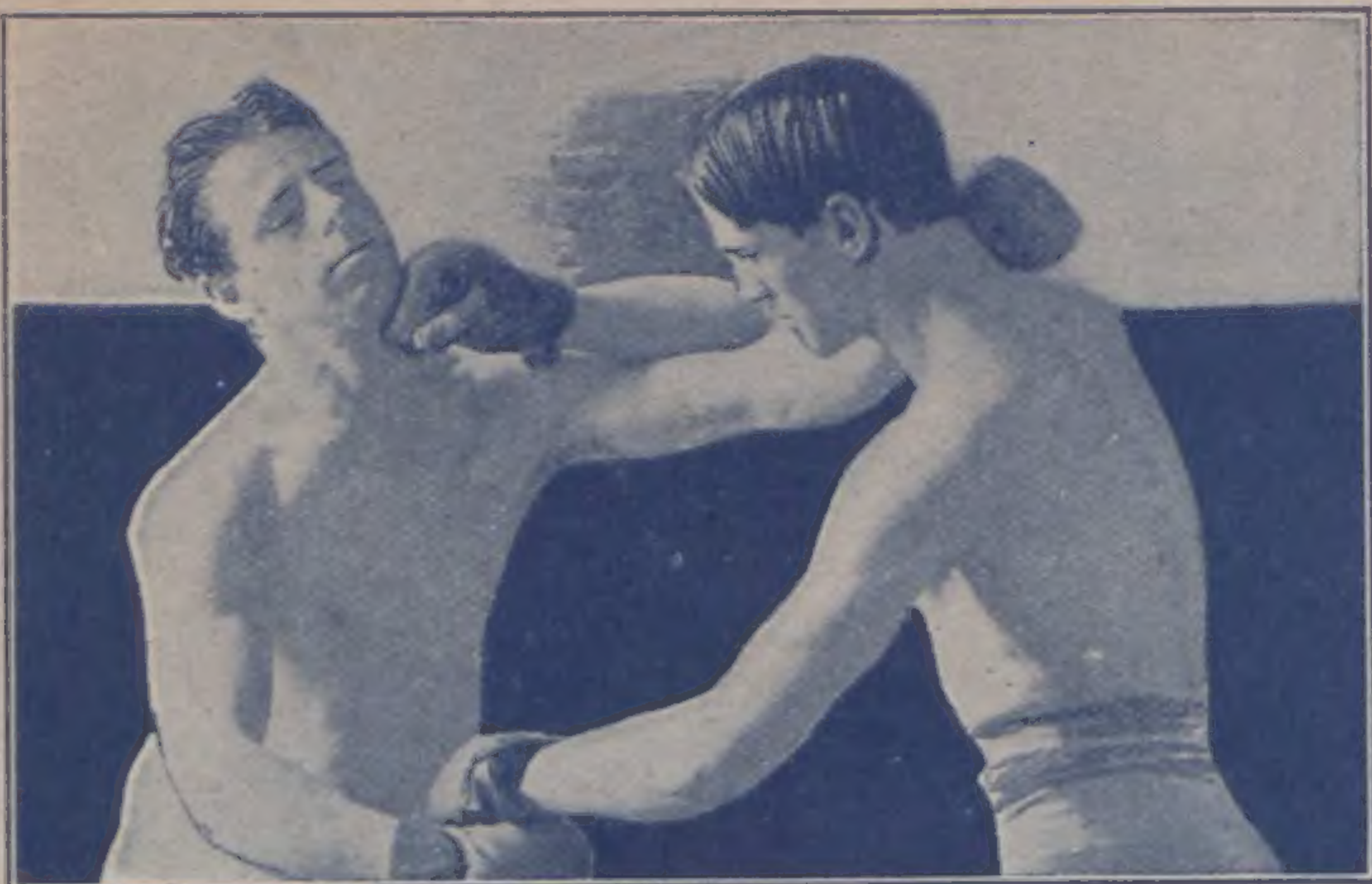
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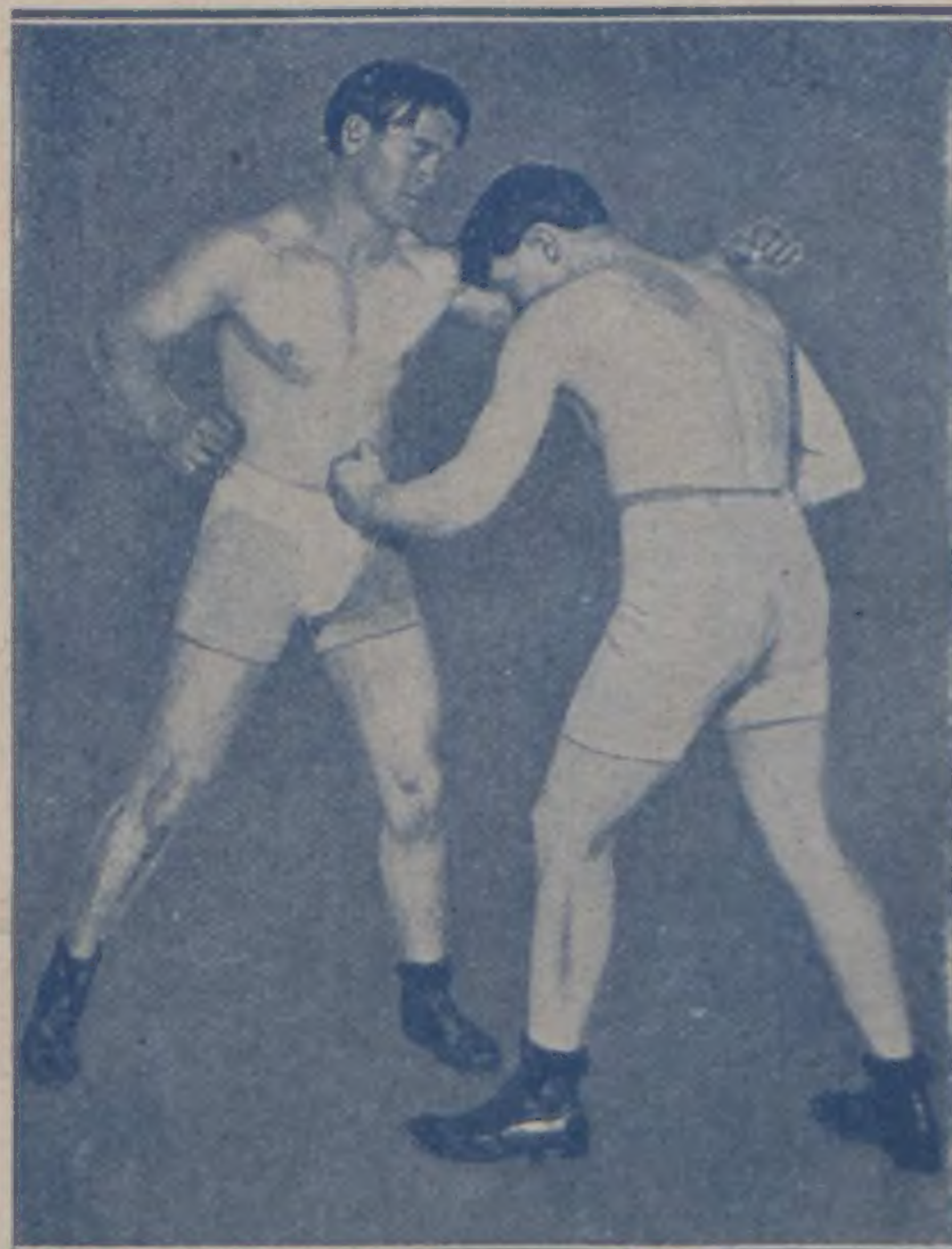
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